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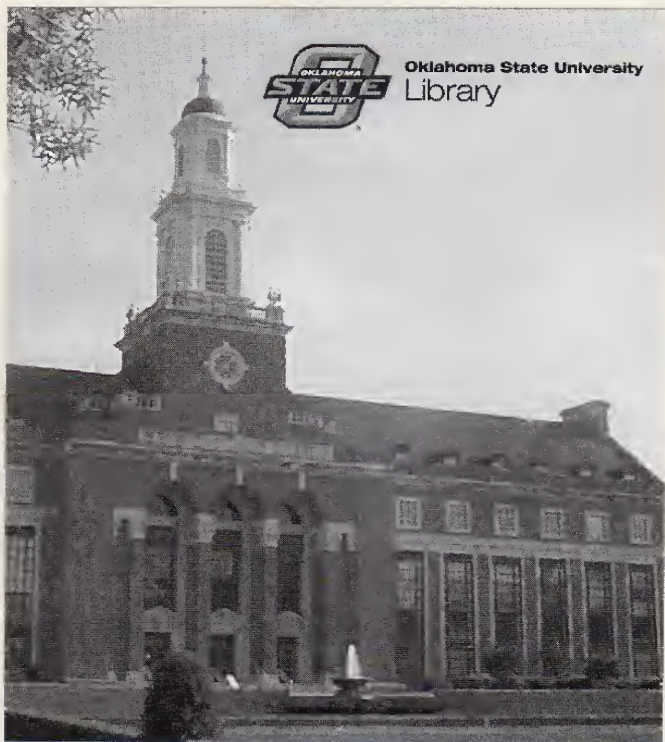
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FOR THE SAKE OF TRUTH AND FOR HISTORY

# THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM

Correspondence exchanged between President Gamal Abdel-Nasser  
and President John Kennedy on the subject of the Palestinian problem.



Gift of  
**Dr. Raymond Habiby**  
OSU Department of Political Science

FOR THE SAKE OF TRUTH AND FOR HISTORY

# **THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM**

Correspondence exchanged between President Gamal Abdel-Nasser  
and President John Kennedy on the subject of the Palestinian problem.

*This is the correspondence exchanged between President Gamal Abdel-Nasser and President John Kennedy on the question of Palestine, which is of interest to all the Arab people.*

*This correspondence is a spotlight on the attitude of the U.A.R. with regard to this problem.*



White House

Washington, 11th May, 1961

Dear Mr. President,

In recent months the world's attention has been centered on several explosive situations, the outcome of which could spell the difference between freedom and servitude, between peace and war, for many millions of people, ultimately perhaps for all mankind. I know that you have been deeply concerned about these problems, as I have been. However, I am confident that you share with me the conviction that through the dedicated efforts of men of goodwill everywhere, the storm clouds of the present can be dispersed.

Meanwhile, leaders responsive to the needs and aspirations of their peoples must, in my firm opinion, be alert to every possibility for advancing basic principles of political and economic justice. Thus, while since my inauguration on January 20 I have perforce been largely occupied with the several international issues of immediate concern, I have given considerable thought to other international issues that deserve the careful attention of us all.

My thoughts have often turned to the Middle East, an area which has contributed so much to the religious and cultural heritage of the world today, and whose potential for further rich contributions to civilization is great. As an American I am proud that the concepts of our founding patriots, of Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt,

have played so great a part in the emergence of vigorous, independent Arab states, respected as sovereign equals in the international community.

I am proud of the tangible encouragement which has been accorded by our Government and people to the aspirations of you and your countrymen in the past, particularly during the critical days of 1956. The United States Government, itself the product of a union of several independent states, was pleased to recognize the formation of the United Arab Republic on February 22, 1958, the Birthday Anniversary of our own first President, Washington.

In recent weeks I have noted some speculation as to the direction of the policies of the United States Administration with respect to the Middle East. Let me assure you that the concepts inherited from the men mentioned above are part of the very fibre of this nation, and that as its President I intend to uphold them. You will find us at all times and all places active in the struggle for equality of opportunity; for Government of the people, by the people and for the people; for freedom from want and fear; and for the application of justice in the settlement of international disputes.

Translating these great precepts into United States policy in the Middle East for the next few years, I want you to know that :

1. The United States will to the best of its ability lend every appropriate assistance to all Middle Eastern states that are determined to control their own destiny,

to enhance the prosperity of their people, and to allow their neighbours to pursue the same fundamental aims.

2. The United States remains ever ready to contribute both within and outside the United Nations to the search for solutions to disputes which dissipate the precious energies of the Middle Eastern states and retard the economic progress which all free peoples rightly desire.

3. With a view toward improving the welfare of the people of the Middle East, the United States is prepared to continue to support national development programs which are effectively designed, to make available American commodities under the Food For Peace Program, and to encourage educational exchanges designed to facilitate political and economic progress.

While tensions unfortunately have sharpened in certain other areas of the world, the Middle East during the past three years has been relatively tranquil. This has been due largely to statesmanship on the part of the area's leaders who have given priority to constructive programs of economic development. Secretary Rusk and I have been struck by the unanimity of views expressed to us by representatives of the various Middle Eastern states emphasizing that the present relative tranquility be preserved.

Underlying tensions do, however, remain, not the least of which is the unresolved Arab-Israeli controversy. I know deep emotions are involved. No easy solution presents itself. The American Government and people believe that an honorable and humane settlement can be found and are willing to share in the labors and burdens which so difficult an achievement must entail, if the parties concerned genuinely desire such participa-

tion. We are willing to help resolve the tragic Palestine Refugee Problem on the basis of the principle of repatriation or compensation for properties, to assist in finding an equitable answer to the question of Jordan River Water resources development and to be helpful in making progress on other aspects of his complex problem.

I am pleased that the United Nations General Assembly recently underscored the necessity to implement more rapidly its previous recommendations on the refugee problem. In this connection, I wish to state unequivocally that this government's position is anchored and will continue to be anchored in the firm bedrock of support for General Assembly recommendations concerning the refugees, and of active, impartial concern that those recommendations be implemented in a way most beneficial to the refugees.

The United States, as a member of the Palestine Conciliation Commission and a nation keenly interested in the long-range advancement of the peoples of the Middle East, takes seriously the task entrusted to the Commission by the United Nations. We are determined to use our influence to assure that the Commission intensify its efforts to promote progress toward a just and peaceful solution. What precise steps the Commission may be able to take are, of course, not yet clear, but I can assure you that there will be no lack of United States interest in seeing that effective action is taken. It is my sincere hope that all the parties directly concerned will cooperate fully with whatever program is undertaken by the Commission so that the best interests and welfare of all the Arab refugees of Palestine may be protected and advanced.

With reference to relations between the United Arab Republic and the United



States, I recognize that our views on important problems do not always coincide. At the same time I am pleased that mutually beneficial relations continue to exist in many spheres and that United States assistance in significant quantities has played a role in your own thorough and detailed development program. As you know, I have recently made proposals to the Congress for aiding in the preservation of Nubian monuments. We continue to welcome the hundreds of UAR students who have entered institutions in our country to further their educations. During his recent consultations in Washington, Ambassador Reinhardt told me of the significant progress which the United Arab Republic has already made in establishing an industrial base which will permit increasing prosperity and higher living standards for all your citizens. I am particularly pleased that we have been able in times past to arrange under favorable conditions the sale of substantial quantities of wheat and other commodities to the United Arab Republic since we re-

cognize the importance of an adequately nourished population. It is my earnest hope that such mutually beneficial cooperation can continue.

I earnestly hope that these views of mine on the Middle East will prove useful to you. Given the long history of friendly relationships between the Arab people and the American people, and the interdependence of all men who wish to remain free, I want to be certain that you and other Arab leaders have no misunderstanding of our attitude towards the Arab people. It continues to be one of sincere friendship. With mutual respect for the others' points of view, mutual and active concern for the betterment of mankind, and mutual striving to eliminate the causes of international tensions, the future will bring even friendlier and more productive relationships between our countries and their freedom-loving people.

Sincerely,

JOHN F. KENNEDY

Alexandria, 22nd August, 1961.

(Unofficial Translation)

Dear President John F. Kennedy,

It is with immense satisfaction and appreciation that I received your letter dated 11th May 1961, in which you raised some aspects of the particular and highly important problem concerning the Arab Nation with its different peoples; the problem is — no doubt — that of Palestine.

I may have been late in answering this letter but the reason was to give that note the deep and careful consideration it deserves.

The reason behind the satisfaction I felt on receiving your letter, as I pointed out in the first paragraph of this note, was that I myself was considering the idea of contacting you on this same problem of which you raised some of its aspects in your letter.

My opinion to contact you was based on a number of factors :

First — The correspondence effectively exchanged between us on different world problems showed that you were trying to open the doors of understanding — and keep them open — between you and a number of other peoples whose main concern goes to the problems of peace with a view to preserving that peace and safeguarding mankind against the dangers threatening it. Those nations feel that reaching common understanding among peoples at the same time affords chances of peace on the soundest and strongest basis.

Second — The Palestine cause — and

the problems that emerged therefrom — apart from being one of the major causes with a direct bearing on world peace in our present day, is at the same time firmly connected with the relationship between our two peoples. Here I wish to add that I do not link the possibilities of understanding between us with the necessity of our views on that problem meeting on an identical basis; but, what I wish to say is that it is vital in that respect that every one of us should have a clear picture of the facts as far as it is humanly possible through the clouds of time and crises.

Third — It is with interest that I followed your references to this problem whether in the speeches you delivered in Congress as representative of the State of Massachusetts or those you delivered during the Presidential Electoral Campaign. Here I would reveal to you that prior to the delivery of your letter, I tried — with the idea of contacting you on the Palestine question in mind — to form a picture of your attitude towards that problem through the lines of your book «The Strategy For Peace». I felt through what I read from you directly or what has been attributed to you on this matter, that there were angles in the problem that called for further clarification.

Yet, in spite of all that, I thought it probably more suitable to defer contacting you on this matter considering the big problems of an urgent and pressing nature that faced you in the international domain.

Hence — as I have already mentioned — my satisfaction at your initiative in writing to me on some aspects of the question. On my part, however, I would like to speak to you of this matter in its



full picture as we see it here on the Arab side. Here, I do not wish to fill up this letter with documents and their meaning, resolutions and their stipulations — for this all may have its proper place — but, I am trying to convey to you our general conception of the problem. Allow me to assure you that this conception does not rest on any emotional basis, but on the sole foundation of what did materially take place.

Mr. President,

Permit me to place before you the following observations, hoping that they would, in their combined form, contribute to the clarification of a quick picture of the problem :

1 — He who does not own has made a promise to he who does not deserve. Then, both «he who does not own» and «he who does not deserve» were able, through force and deceit, to usurp the right of the legitimate owner and take away from him what he owned and deserved.

This is the true picture of the Balfour Declaration : Britain's pledge, promising to establish — in a land she does not own, but is owned by the Arab people of Palestine — a Jewish home in Palestine.

On the individual basis, Mr. President — not to speak of the international basis — the picture as such shows a clear case of larceny in which any ordinary court can convict those responsible.

2. — Unfortunately, Mr. President, the United States, in this case, has placed its entire weight in a scale other than that of justice and law, against every principle of American freedom and American democracy. Regretfully, the motive behind this was local political considerations that had nothing to do with American prin-

ciples or even with American interest on its international level. Endeavour to win the Jewish votes in the Presidential elections was the local motive. One of the former American Ambassadors in the region wrote that when your predecessor, Mr. Harry S. Truman, concentrated his full force — and in this he had of course the power of his grave position as head of the American nation — against the obvious right in the future of Palestine, he had no argument to the responsible officials who drew his attention to the seriousness of his attitude, except the remark :

« Do the Arabs have any votes in the American Presidential elections ? »

3. — The fantasy of military victory on which some elements try to build an established right for the Israeli State in Palestine, is but an illusion created by the propaganda which exerted every effort to conceal the truth.

I am not asking you to listen to my testimony — in that respect — as a soldier who actually lived that experience ; the United Nations documents and the reports of the International Truce Mediator in Palestine and its committees will prove to you that the Israeli forces did not occupy the land they seized through fighting on the battlefield ; it is indeed strange that all this should have taken place under cover of the truce. What the Arabs did at the time was to believe in the United Nations ; they imagined it to be a force capable of imposing justice particularly if, basically, justice was its word and decision. The Arabs thought that the Israeli side would be punished for breaking the International Truce laws and that the land it had usurped under the truce cover would be restored. Unfortunately, however, we were later punished for the ideal look we cast at the United Nations, a look inspired by confidence.

4 — This apart, the Israeli danger does not merely represent the aggression already committed against the Arab right, but it extends to the Arab future and threatens it with fabulous dangers. If you were to observe the constant Jewish immigration to Israel and its encouragement as well as the opening of the gates before it, you would share our view that this immigration creates a pressure within Israel that has to explode and head for expansion. This is probably the logical explanation to the strong alliance between Israel and imperialist interests in our area. In fact, since its creation, Israel has not gone very far from the imperialist orbit and it has always been clear that she feels the strong connection between her interests and those of imperialism. Meanwhile, imperialism on its part used Israel as a tool to divide the Arab nation geographically, and also as a base from which to threaten any movement aimed at liberation from imperialist domination. As a proof of this, I merely have to recall to you the circumstances of the tripartite aggression against us and the collusion that preceded it in 1956.

By this quick review of the picture in its broadlines I wished to inform you that our attitude towards Israel is not a complex laden with emotion but :

- an aggression launched in the past,
- dangers moving in the present,
- and a mysterious future enveloped in tension and anxiety, ready to explode any moment.

To be quite fair, it seems to me that some Arab elements have contributed to presenting the problem to you as an emotional charge; in this connection I recall that your predecessor, President Dwight Eisenhower, told me when I had the honour of meeting him in New York

on the 26th of September 1960, that some Arab statesmen used to make open, strong declarations on Palestine, and then contact the American Government to reduce the effect of their intransigence, explaining that their declarations were merely for Arab local consumption.

I am indeed sorry that those weak and hesitant voices have been able to find those who would listen to them in your country, although — despite their seeming intransigence in support of right — they have found no response in our countries and no one to believe in them. Events have later shown, however, that those who deceived you have not been able to deceive their people.

Mr. President,

I have tried to be absolutely frank in my talk with you. It may appear from the principles of the traditional diplomatic language that I have exceeded the limits imposed by complimentary considerations, but I assure you, I believe there is nothing more sublime in honouring a friend than true expression by he who is attached to him by esteem. With this in mind, permit me, now that I have dealt with the question from its Israeli aspect, to speak of the American part of the picture.

First, allow me to assure you that my deep faith was, and still is, that reaching an Arab-American understanding is an important aim of ours, worthy of all efforts, and that we should keep trying and never despair in our attempts to reach it.

Here we speak through our conscious knowledge of American history and our deep admiration for the characteristics of the American nation as well as through our sincere sharing in many of the principles of struggle which guided your great nation to its present status.



Now, allow me to take the following observations :

1. — We have always tried, and are still trying and will invariably insist on trying to extend our hand to the American nation. I assure you that what affects us most deeply is the fact that we often find our hand hanging alone in the air.

You have kindly referred in your letter, Mr. President, to the role played by President Woodrow Wilson and President Franklin Roosevelt, in the emergence of independent Arab States, with equal sovereignty in the international society. Allow me to observe that the two great Presidents do not represent in our country hopes that have been realised as much as they do hopes that have not been realised.

A strong national revolution had broken out in our country demanding the right to self-determination; and, when President Wilson declared his famous fourteen points, their repercussions on the powerful national revolution were strong and effective.

A delegation representing the national revolution in Egypt — at the time — headed for Paris to attend the Peace Conference and call for Egypt's right to self-determination. Among the banners hoisted by that delegation and on which it supported itself, were those same principles of Woodrow Wilson; yet, President Wilson refused to meet the delegation which found no opportunity to explain the case of its country before the Paris Peace Conference. The only way left before that delegation and before the people who had sent it was armed popular resistance against imperialism. The conquering force was the imperialist weapon used to stifle the popular revolution — all against every call for self-determination.

The Atlantic principles proclaimed by President Roosevelt in 1941 with regard to the liberation of peoples were also able to attract the hopes of our people; our ill-fortune was probably the fact that President Roosevelt did not live long enough to see the end of the war and have the opportunity to place his enormous power and the force of his country behind the principles which he proclaimed during the crisis of Fascist despotism.

2. — The big blow to Arab-American relations was caused by the preference given to considerations of American local policy, over those of American justice and American interest in deciding your position with regard to the circumstances in which the Arab right in Palestine was fully usurped; I have already referred to this matter when dealing with the Israeli aspect of the Palestine problem.

3. — Misunderstanding between us became serious and more acute between 1954 and 1955 owing to the difference in our views over one, same problem, that of Middle East defence.

Our view was that military pacts, particularly those relying on big world powers, do not ensure Middle East defence, but rather increase the dangers to which the area is exposed in the same measure as it drags it to the cold war.

Our opinion was that true Middle East defence should be handled by the countries of that Middle East, and that its field is not its defence lines as much as it is the peoples' internal fronts. Free, unconditional independence, and fruitful efforts for constructive national development were the best safeguard for Middle East security against any aggression whatever its source. I had the opportunity of explaining this personally to the late Mr. John Foster Dulles, then United States



Secretary of State, when I met him in Cairo in 1952.

4. — While the big talk on Middle East defence was in full swing, there occurred the incident which was a sort of a turning point in the trend of events, by this incident I mean the raid on Gaza in February 1955, when the Israeli army launched a brutal offensive raid on the Palestine city of Gaza. I do not wish to add to what the United Nations documents have already reported in describing that raid: they said it was «brutal and premeditated».

Yet, the Israeli Defence Minister and actual Premier congratulated those who had launched that raid according to his orders and carried out the same aggressive plan against Egypt — at that time — that plan which was aimed at Egypt's internal front, as proved by the facts that leaked out of what is known in Israel as the Lavon Affair and which showed that the aim was to explode bombs in our country, destroy our installations and harm our relations with friendly countries, among which was the United States of America. The Israeli agents placed incendiary bombs in front of its offices in Cairo. Simultaneously the plan was aimed at the truce lines as shown by the raid on Gaza.

This made us feel that our concentration on national development was fruitless before aggression, and that we had to devote part of our attention — besides development — to armed preparations to repel any aggression launched against us.

We started off by asking with insistence to buy weapons from the United States. Faced with procrastination and then rejection, I took the decision of purchasing armaments from the Soviet Union. I assure you that I shall remain grateful to the Government of the Soviet Union,

and, I trust that had you been in my place you would have felt just the same as you saw your country being threatened from all sides and you lacked the means to punish the aggressors.

5. — The result was that the relations between us passed through a difficult period, and attempts were made to deform our national policy intentionally. We were subjected to various sorts of psychological warfare which included the beaming of poisonous propaganda broadcasts by secret radio stations directed against our people with the hope of shaking their faith in their Revolutionary Government.

The peak of the psychological war came with the decision taken to withdraw the American offer to contribute to the financing of the Aswan High Dam — the offer which the American Government had thankfully made, with its own free choice. This was followed by the immediate withdrawal of the World Bank from financing the whole operation.

There was no doubt that the way in which the offer was withdrawn carried with it a great deal that the Arab people in Egypt would not tolerate.

6. — Then, we appreciated the attitude adopted by the United States of America in trying to find a peaceful solution to the problem which arose at that time following nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company. Moreover, our deepest appreciation went to the great support given to the cause of freedom in our country, by the American Government and people, when the conspiracy of collusion fomented against our country by Britain, France and Israel was unveiled, and when the attack was launched — on October 29th 1956 — the same day scheduled for the opening of talks in Geneva with the object of reaching a final solution in the light of the

Security Council resolutions on the Suez Canal.

Our feelings were that the American people felt our position through the memories of their experience in Pearl Harbour. We were right, but, unfortunately, the big improvement in our relations in the days of the sanguinary crisis suffered a terrific setback: following the Suez battle which ended with the defeat of aggression, the United States policy aimed at isolating Egypt and achieving the aims of aggression by peaceful means, through the Eisenhower Plan which wanted to consider the Middle East — as you observed during discussion of the plan in the American Congress — as if it were an American State.

7. — Later, Syria was exposed to a dangerous crisis threatening its security through the concentration of a number of states of the Baghdad Pact, whether collectively as members of an organisation or through their individual efforts. The aim was to strike at Syria's internal national front. This could have had disastrous effects on the security of the entire Middle East. Several times we tried to draw the attention of the American Government to the dangers of such destructive efforts on the part of the Baghdad Pact and its states.

8. — The Baghdad Pact collapsed, the Revolution in Iraq decided its fate. With the collapse of that pact, the United States policy towards the Arab area collapsed; and, there was an urgent need for a new conscious policy that learns from the experience of the past, can face the present and can meet the future.

Our hope was great that the United States would be afforded the opportunity to study this area in the light of a new outlook unaffected by old considerations

and not subjected to ties that do not represent the true aspirations of the Arab peoples.

It is indeed painful that the United States Government should not have asked itself following the collapse of the Baghdad Pact, with regard to the relationship of the Arab peoples with it :

« Why is the American policy reduced to such ruins ? »

« Why have most traditional friends of the American policy vanished, condemned by their peoples ? »

« Why does the United States, a country established on freedom and revolution, oppose the call of freedom and the revolutionary feeling and find itself standing in line with the reactionary forces and the enemies of progress ? »

9. — There followed a period of improvement, but slow improvement, in Arab-American relations. Blows were always lurking and the motives were absolutely non-American. As an example I would refer to the boycotting of the Arab ship « Cleopatra » in the New York docks.

Later, in September 1960, I had the opportunity of meeting with your predecessor, General Dwight Eisenhower, and discussing with him the relationship between our two countries and its development as well as the necessity of considering this relationship in a new light compatible with the peace based on justice to which we all look forward. This, however, was as you may remember, towards the end of his term of office, and, therefore, the new attempt was not afforded the chance of being tested.

**Mr. President,**

This does not at all mean that our relationship throughout all that period did not have its bright moments.



The history of the American nation had a great deal that attracted us to many American principles and to the vast experience and heroic men that the American Revolution passed on to human heritage.

There was your country's attitude towards us during the aggression against our land. We have always paid tribute to that position which marks the triumph of principles, and we shall ever remain grateful for that, whatever the development of relations between us.

There was also your valuable assistance through the export of wheat or through the loans of the Development Fund. I also wish to pay tribute to your great contribution to the plan for the preservation of the Nubian monuments ; your admirable message to Congress in that connection was a warm greeting to our country, which our people welcomed with satisfaction and appreciation.

Mr. President,

The aim behind this lengthy review of some aspects of the picture is to explain that the problems of the Arab East are strongly inter-related.

My aim was to explain to you that the right of the Arab Palestinian is connected with the right of the Palestinian Motherland, and that the other Arab nations cannot isolate themselves from the aggression launched on one of them, for the obvious reason that this aggression — irrespective of the deep meaning of Arab solidarity — threatens the other Arab states with the same danger and the same fate.

My aim was also to explain to you that the difficulties we had to face in our relationship were a constant chain with its links interconnected and which, to my mind, was exposed to non-American

pressure in most circumstances. Here, Mr. President, I sincerely wish to appeal to you, calling upon your youth and courage, to see that the time has come when the United States should open her eyes to the development of events in our area on the basis of a purely American look, unaffected by considerations of local American policy and by the operation of vote-counting in elections, for, the links of the United States with this region are much deeper than any local consideration. We from far away feel that the American people are passing through a period of soul-searching to face the disturbed world and its dangerous probabilities.

No other period affords a better opportunity to rid the mind of the artificial bonds and the chains of short-lived partisan profits, to rewin the principle-inspired position which aims at the realisation of American security on its high level. We do not doubt that your looking forward to «The New Frontiers» — to quote your expression — and your constant attempts to discover the road of duty before the great American people will be a source of comfort to our people and to many other peoples who harbour love and admiration for the American nation.

Mr. President,

There remains one last observation I wish to make freely and in all sincerity, before I end this letter ; the observation, at any rate, is connected with this note. I have tried in this letter to open my heart to you , and, if any one of those who might be reading this letter would think that it was dictated by considerations of Arab local politics, that would be a grave mistake.

I wanted this letter to be for you and not to be for what some of those, who



pretend to be experienced, might call «local consumption or psychological mobilisation».

If you allowed me I would say that those who followed events in my country know that in all circumstances I prefer to tell my nation what I feel it is its duty to know.

Moreover, the Palestine question needs no psychological mobilisation, since our entire nation lives that problem as an actual fact and not an emotional complex.

I assure you with honour that what governs my attitude and outlook with regard to the Palestine case is not my position as President of the United Arab Republic, but the basis here is my attitude and outlook as an Arab national, as one of millions of Arab nationals.

Please accept, Mr. President, my deepest respect and highest esteem.

(Signed) Gamal Abdel-Nasser

President of the U.A.R.

Information Department

**Information Department**